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Time for strategic good will

The loss of the Iranian stations used for monitoring Soviet missile tests in Central Asia may provide us with a splendid opportunity for testing the Soviet Union's good will in the limiting of strategic weapons.

The test will come when the Soviets are asked if they will cooperate in helping us regain the lost monitoring capability by operating U-2 reconnaissance flights in Turkish airspace. Turkey has reluctantly agreed to permit the flights, which will originate in Cyprus, but only if the Soviets do not object. Presumably, the State Department is now in the process of asking the Soviets to approve the flights or at least to look the other way and not disapprove of them.

Kremlin leaders will do some teeth-gnashing before they decide this one. The U-2 is well remembered as the plane that crisscrossed the Soviet Union with impunity in the early '60s until a Soviet missile shot down Francis Gary Powers. The overflights were a sore point at the time and the Soviets were jubilant when they finally bagged one

and stopped the spying. They will not be happy about permitting similar planes to resume their monitoring missions not only with impunity, but with permission.

However, the flights may be crucial to Senate ratification of the new SALT agreement, which the Soviets want badly. If they use their influence over Turkey to prevent the flights, a number of borderline senators may be persuaded that the Soviet Union plans to cheat on the treaty.

In fact, Soviet cheating could be easily detected during the coming year, even without the U-2 flights. U.S. intelligence analysts expect only one new missile program to begin testing this year, but it will be of a type that is tested only from a test range in northern Russia. U.S. monitoring of the northern range was unaffected by the Iranian revolution.

Nevertheless, any Kremlin resistance will look bad to many senators. So if the Soviet leaders really want a SALT treaty they should force a smile and say, "Hello, again," to their old acquaintance, the U-2.